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ABSTRACT

Vocational educators must integrate marketing into school operation in a way that will enable them to better plan and deliver professional services that address the needs of students, employers, and society. Educators should be aware that marketing in educational settings is different from marketing in profit-making and service organizations, and moreover, that there are considerations unique to the marketing of vocational education. Educational leaders must also realize that internal marketing is equally or perhaps more important than external marketing. Internal marketing relates to the educational programs and services the school offers its consumers, and since the programs, and the faculty and support staff who deliver them are the actual services being marketed, all three must be professional and of high quality if external marketing efforts are to succeed. At present, however, the vast majority of research and literature on marketing in secondary vocational education is related to influencing external groups. Four conclusions about the role of marketing in secondary vocational education can serve as recommendations for future marketing implementation by secondary vocational education leaders: (1) secondary vocational education has a generally positive impact; (2) additional structure in marketing activities is needed; (3) vocational educators should view themselves as more a part of the mainstream reforms occurring in education; and (4) a more comprehensive focus that emphasizes the internal dimension as well as promotion, is needed. (19 references) (YLB)

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THE STATUS OF MARKETING IN SECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Submitted to Dr. Alice Darr, Director
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THE STATUS OF MARKETING IN SECONDARY VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

A. Introduction

"As time passes, schools, colleges, universities, and other educational institutions recognize that they face marketing problems" (Kotler and Fox, 1985).

This statement points out the emerging importance of marketing as an activity to address changes needed in vocational education at the secondary level. The growing interest in marketing in the educational arena can be traced to the sweeping changes that have occurred in the educational market place . Demographic shifts, technological advancements, competition, and changing societal values all influence the role of vocational education in America. The need for an expanded role for marketing is evident in the following statement:

> "The literature on vocational education indicates a number of factors that have shaped the need for a change in the vocational education system. These factors include Japanese industrial pressure and philosophy, technological advancements, a shortage of skilled workers, and a mismatch between available jobs and trained workers" (Chambliss, 1988).

For many educational leaders, marketing is viewed as a process to respond to these various changes. Moreover, marketing has become the vehicle to address the well-accepted notion that vocational education suffers from an image problem. This conclusion seems to have its roots in the inconsistency vocational educators see between the contribution of vocational education and the perceived importance of it by the general public. Walker points out:

> General perceptions of the value of vocational education as a program for helping all Americans are ambiguous. If this were not the case, we should expect to see vocational education among the recommendations for improvement associated with the education reform now underway...The question we need to ask ourselves now is: Can an appropriate valuing for vocational education be achieved and can marketing perform a role in realizing this goal? (Walker, 1987).

Marketing has been widely applied in product and service organizations in the private sector. In the 1980's, marketing became routine in health, law, dental, financial services, and non-profit organizations. Educational institutions followed the lead of service companies embracing marketing as a method for solving its various problems. As the educational marketplace continues to change, marketing will perform an increasingly important role in the day-to-day operation of all educational institutions including those in vocational education settings.

Vocational education professionals engaged in marketing have a number of needs to be satisfied as they increase their marketing efforts. First, there is the need to plan marketing so it is truly an integral component of school operation. Typically, marketing has been viewed as an activity to conduct when extra funds are available. To be effective, marketing must be as organizationally sophisticated as accounting or human resource management. Also,

educational marketers have a need to be accurate in their application of marketing. The margin for error is too great when a complex activity such as marketing is viewed as something to be done by untrained, inexperienced staff. Finally, those educators involved in marketing vocational education need to know how to effectively implement a comprehensive marketing effort. For many educators, marketing is viewed as a one-dimensional, externally-oriented activity.

This document addresses many of the previous points in an attempt to provide vocational educators with background information useful to their understanding and application of the marketing process. Specifically, this document addresses the following goals:

-review marketing as it is currently being practiced in secondary vocational education settings.
-provide insight into areas not currently being addressed.
-provide suggestions for the improvement of marketing in secondary vocational education.
-provide background information for those engaged in vocational education reform.

B. An Overview of Marketing

Marketing is a process that includes all activities associated with satisfying specific needs of consumer groups. These activities usually relate to product conception and design, information gathering, pricing, promotions, accessibility, and customer service. All of these activities must be coordinated through a marketing plan to insure that the process is efficient and responsive to the needs of the consumer group. A consumer or client needs are the basis for the marketing effort in an organization. Without this basis, an organization is likely to misdirect it marketing efforts. Marketing is a very dynamic process subject to constant change because it reflects the changes that occur within the marketplace. It is essential for an organization to have a clear focus regarding the consumer needs it satisfies if it is to change and respond to the marketplace. Also, the organization must direct its marketing efforts toward controllable and uncontrollable factors that influence it. Marketers must plan strategies for controllable factors and prepare for the uncontrollable.

Marketing as it functions in educational settings is different than in profit-making product and service organizations. Moreover, the marketing of any specific level (secondary, adult, college, etc.) or program area (foreign languages, mathematics, vocational, etc.) within education will have unique marketing applications. The following considerations are unique to the marketing of vocational education.

1. Vocational education, like all education, is a professional service similar to law, medicine, dentistry, or public accounting. Also, it is different from non-professional services such as laundromats and hair styling in the respect that it includes an ethical, professional dimension as a societal institution.
2. Vocational education at the secondary level operates

almost entirely in a non-profit setting. This results in a non-profit culture in schools which limits the enthusiasm administrators and faculty are likely to give the marketing process.

3. The environment in which vocational education functions includes numerous uncontrollable factors resulting in very challenging market planning. Leaders in vocational education (and in public education in general) are mandated to follow legislation and funding rather than entirely plan their own destiny.
4. Marketing in educational settings, including vocational education, is not totally market driven. Unlike many profit making settings where the consumer determines what will be produced and marketed, the consumers of educational services (students) typically do not determine what they will consume. Similar to law, medicine, and other professional services, the service provider prescribes programs and services that best address the consumer's needs. This prescription is based on the assumption that the service provider's expertise enables them to decide what is the best course of action to satisfy the consumer's needs.
5. Image is an essential aspect of marketing a professional service for two reasons. First, services are intangible and the mental pictures (image) consumers form greatly influence their purchase decisions. Also, professionalism of service providers is often perceived by consumers as the image they form of a professional service.

A final aspect of understanding the marketing process is the importance of the relationship between internal and external dimensions of marketing. As planners of marketing, educational leaders must realize that internal marketing is equally or perhaps more important than external marketing. Internal marketing relates to the educational programs and service providers the school offers its consumers. Since the programs and the faculty who deliver them, as well as the support staff who assist both, are the actual services being marketed, it is crucial that internal marketing be addressed. In short, the programs, faculty, and support staff must be professional and of high quality if any external marketing efforts are to succeed.

C. Internal Marketing Activities

Marketers of professional education services must understand that, in a very real sense, they are the service the consumer purchases. Good medical care is only as good as the physician and supporting staff who provide the care. As a result, everything the service provider does; from providing the care, courtesy of the office staff, to billing procedures, all influence the consumers satisfaction. The comprehensive quality of internal marketing was described by consultant Deede Sharpe as:

> Internal marketing techniques and strategies are interwoven throughout an operation and are an integral

part of the management style (Sharpe, 1987).

Clearly, internal marketing is closely tied to the individuals who plan, support and deliver a professional service.

A review of literature on the marketing of vocational education indicates a need for fundamental change in vocational education itself, the way it is delivered, who delivers it, and who it serves. For example, studies cite needed changes in vocational curricula to be more customized, more oriented toward basic skills, and more interdisciplinary (Chambliss, 1988 and Homer, 1985). Also, studies show a need for greater faculty development (Homer, 1985, New Hampshire, 1985, Ohio Department of Education, 1990) to improve program quality and image. The various services associated with offering vocational education also may need revision or rethinking. Some studies reveal that the monitoring of student services, such as placement, need attention (Albright, 1986). And, despite considerable time and effort to educate guidance personnel on the role of vocational education, a study in Yakima, WA found significant barriers to enrolling in vocational programs. These barriers included inadequate program counseling and scheduling conflicts (Akamine, 1986).

As reform continues in vocational education, overall program quality will greatly influence internal marketing. The continuing quest for better advisory committees and a closer partnership with business and industry will result in more dynamic, sophisticated programming. The very needs vocational education addresses will continue to shift from a purely technical focus to one educating the "whole" person including basic skills as well as futuristic thinking (Blinn, 1986). To achieve this transition, the goals and procedures by which vocational education operates must be re-directed. This redirection will affect everyone connected with planning and delivering professional vocational education services. This development was summarized in a statement during a modernization forum held in Ohio:

> We need more than a mission. We need a shared vision in which all participants see themselves in new roles and relationships.

Internal marketing will perform an important part in defining and explaining these new roles and relationships.

D. External Marketing Activities

External marketing relates to activities associated with influencing the attitudes and beliefs held by particular groups of people outside of an organization. These groups can be students, parents, employers, business representatives, civic leaders, lawmakers, etc. The vast majority of the research and literature on marketing in secondary vocational education is related to influencing these external groups especially students and parents (usually treated as one group) and employers. Considerable activity has occurred in marketing efforts to recruit and understand the student group.

Two major studies have been conducted that explore student enrollment in vocational education. A 1986 study of 19,134 Louisiana students determined factors that influenced their decision-making regarding enrollment in vocational education. The

students attitude toward vocational education were generally favorable and increased in favorability as the students became more familiar with vocational education. Also, the study revealed that over two-thirds of the students were being encouraged by their parents to attend college while 80 percent were being encouraged by teachers and counselors to attend college. Persons in the home had the most influence on career choice (Louisiana Department of Education, 1986). A second study investigated why 11th grade students in Ohio decided not to enroll in vocational education. The primary reason for not enrolling in vocational education was they wanted to go to college. This reason was shared with a general negative image of vocational education and vocational students. Mothers/female guardians had the most influence on curriculum choice (Rossetti, 1989). These two studies clearly indicate that the extensive marketing efforts directed toward students may be justified. However, it appears uncertain if the marketing efforts are having any positive influence on students attitudes and perception of vocational education.

The literature features numerous image and public relations studies related to vocational education. These studies vary from public relations efforts directed toward very general audiences (Moore, 1988) to those aimed directly at specific audiences such as administrators (Maine, 1988). These projects typically develop and/or propose various public relations activities such as brochures, public relation calendars, videos, slide-tape presentations, writing press releases, etc. These external efforts seemed to be rooted in the assumption that vocational educators must do a better job of communicating with their various publics. A review of a number of studies on recruitment practices concluded the recruitment emphasis was on communication between vocational educators and students, parents, and counselors (Drier, 1987). Some of these public relation/communication efforts have been directed at very specific purposes. For example, Broward County School Board in Florida conducted a project to communicate career options for women in non-traditional vocational programs. An extensive public relations program was designed to educate the public on the adverse effects of sex stereotyping. The overall results indicated most students included in the study changed their views on sex stereotyping after participating in an information program (Zylinski and Wagner, 1987). The literature also refers to a number of public relations efforts utilizing broadcast media. One school board as early as 1984 was using radio announcements as well as displays at shopping malls and promotional items such as buttons, calendars, etc. (Brodhead, 1984).

E. Conclusions Regarding Marketing in Secondary Vocational Education

The preceding review of marketing activities in secondary vocational education indicates that vocational educators must expand their understanding and implementation of the marketing process. The following four conclusions about the role of marketing in secondary vocational education can also serve as recommendations for future marketing implementation by secondary vocational education leaders.

1. Positive Impact of Secondary Vocational Education
Secondary vocational education has generally been viewed as a positive educational offering. The literature does indicate some negative views of vocational education. However, the literature also supports the notion that people (students, employers, etc) tend to view vocational education in a positive manner as their experience with it increases. For example, a Wisconsin study concluded that vocational education in Wisconsin was held in very high regard by students, educators, and employers (Wisconsin, 1988). Also, a comprehensive study on vocation education in Georgia indicated that vocational eduction in that state was experiencing success (Stonehouse, 1987). These studies support the notion that various target populations support vocational education when they understand it.

2. Additional Structure Needed
The various marketing efforts reviewed in the literature indicate vocational educators need to provide more structure to the marketing activities occurring in vocational education. It appears that marketing is viewed as an "add-on" activity rather than a completely integral component of the everyday operations of vocational education institutions. The literature indicates a lack of full-time, professionally-prepared marketing personnel planning and performing the marketing function. Also, little evidence exists of any staff development activities that prepare administrators and faculty to engage in the marketing process.

3. Vocational Education in the Mainstream
Vocational educators must view themselves as more a part of the mainstream reforms occurring in education. The mission of vocational education must be more oriented toward the career and academic goals of general education. For example, an Ohio study concluded that vocational education should seek ways to become more integrated with the academic curriculum (Rossetti, 1989). It appears that vocational education be a viable option for all secondary students.

4. A Comprehensive Focus is Needed
The vast majority of the marketing activities identified in the literature reflect an external marketing effort. Specifically, past and current marketing efforts in secondary vocational education focus on the promotional dimension of marketing. The emphasis on promotion is so extensive it almost appears that marketing and promotion are synonymous in the minds of vocational educators. Clearly, vocational educators need to view marketing as a more comprehensive activity that includes strategies related to product, pricing, and accessibility factors. It appears that vocational educators have developed appropriate and effective methods regarding the external environment. However, it is also evident that considerable effort is needed to expand marketing

activities directed toward the internal dimension of vocational education.

Summary

Vocational educators face many challenges as a new century approaches. Integrating the marketing process is certainly one of those challenges. In fact, vocational education leaders should be planning for a marketing culture in their institutions. A thorough understanding and implementation of marketing will enable vocational educators to better plan and deliver professional services that address the needs of students, employers, and society.

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